

Knowing God as Love

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

RELAX AND REFOCUS (*SILENCIO*)

Center yourself by breathing slowly in and out. Relax your neck and take time to let your muscles relax.

If a distraction interrupts you (such as remembering something you need to do), rest your hands in your lap with your palms up and offer that distraction to God. Turn your hands over to signify receiving God's peace.

Optional—You may wish to begin by considering this question: When have I felt truly loved?

READ (*LECTIO*)

Read the passage to yourself silently. As you read, do not concern yourself with how your life measures up to what love is. This passage isn't about the kind of love that humans typically exhibit, but about *agapē* love, which is engaging the will for the good of another.¹ Paul is describing divine love here.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸Love never fails.

Because Paul was writing about divine love, it may help to substitute the word *God* for *love*. As the apostle John wrote, “We know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them” (1 John 4:16). We may infer, then, that whatever love is like, God is also like.

Read the passage aloud a second time, substituting the word *God* for *love*:

⁴God is patient, God is kind. He God does not envy, does not boast, is not proud. ⁵He does not dishonor others, is not self-seeking, is not easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶God does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷He always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸God never fails.

REFLECT (*MEDITATIO*)

Questions and cues to help you reflect on the passage.

1. Which qualities or actions from the passage surprise you when they are attributed to God? Why do you think that surprises you?
2. Consider these versions of 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. The word *God* has been substituted for *love* and a few adaptations have been made.

Which descriptions of God do you find most engaging? Most disturbing? Most surprising?

NRSV	N. T. Wright translation¹	<i>The Message</i>
God is patient	God is great-hearted	God never gives up
God is kind	kind	God cares more for others than for self
God is not envious	knows no jealousy	God doesn't want what [he] doesn't have
or boastful	makes no fuss	God doesn't strut
or arrogant	is not puffed up	Doesn't have a swelled head
or rude	knows no shameful ways	Doesn't force [his] own self on others
God does not insist on [his] own way	doesn't force rightful claims	Isn't always "me first"
not irritable	doesn't rage	Doesn't fly off the handle
or resentful	doesn't bear a grudge	Doesn't keep score of the sins of others
does not rejoice in wrongdoing	doesn't cheer at others' harm	Doesn't revel when others grovel
rejoices in the truth	rejoices in the truth	Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth
bears all things	bears all things	Puts up with anything
believes all things	believes all things	Trusts always
hopes all things	hopes all things	Always looks for the best
endures all things	endures all things	Never looks back
God never ends	God never fails	Keeps going to the end

3. What Scripture passages or stories come to mind that bear out the truth that God is love? For example, consider Israel's behavior from the exodus through the judges, the monarchy, the divided kingdom, the dispersion and Judah's return from Persia. God's persistent love, despite Israel's tendency to depend on other gods and on themselves, shows us that God never gives up.
4. Setting cue: Paul's point of view. Picture the apostle Paul writing to the Corinthian church he knew so well, and realizing that "there are

¹Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 175.

quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters” (1 Corinthians 1:11). Even in the early church, love could be forgotten in the midst of controversy. As N. T. Wright says, “People sometimes talk as if first-generation Christianity enjoyed a pure, untroubled honeymoon period, after which things became more difficult; but there is no evidence for this in the New Testament.”² Paul painted a picture of living life with God’s kind of love.

Perhaps Paul was in tears because of their quarrels as he wrote these words. Or he may have been captivated by a majestic, penetrating view of God.

Reflect on the invitation. Perhaps God is offering you an invitation through this passage to enlarge your understanding or to think and feel differently about what God is like. Read the passage again and then sit quietly for a few minutes, pondering these questions:

- What words or phrases stand out to you?
- Why do you think that is?

Reflect a little further. You may wish to read the passage again. Then consider:

- How does this passage connect with your life?
- Is there some idea, feeling or intention you need to embrace from it? If so, what?
- What might God be inviting you to be, know, understand, feel or do?

Be open to the quiet, and don’t feel pressured to come up with an answer.

RESPOND (*ORATIO*)

Take a few minutes to respond to God in prayer. What do you most want to say to God about this experience in Scripture?

You may ask God questions (the answers to which may come to you later). You may wish to write your prayer down. Sometimes that helps keep our minds from wandering.

REST (*CONTEMPLATIO*)

Soak in what has stood out to you and consider your overall impression of God from this passage. Notice how it feels to know you are “fully known” by God, as Paul writes later in the same chapter (verse 12).

Spend a few minutes soaking in the thoughts that have come to you. This may take the form of worship, or of simply resting in God’s presence.

TRYING IT ON (*INCARNATIO*)

Read the passage a few times throughout your day or week, pondering how God shows to you the kind of love described in this passage. How is God patient with you? How is God not rude or pushy with you? How does God always protect you?